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ABSTRACT

An instrument was designed to allow respondents to freely express their opinions concerning the major learning problems of students in the public schools, the quality and nature of their teacher education programs, and their retrospective views of courses which would have met their needs better than the ones which were taken. The instrument used to collect the data was an open-ended opinionnaire which was distributed to all public school administrative units within a 24-county area of southwest Missouri. Administrators were requested to distribute the instrument to faculty members and to some students as well. The 158 respondents indicated, among other things, that their preparation was not adequate for teaching the expressive and receptive communication skills, for teaching children appropriate questioning skills, for matching materials with children's reading levels, or for organizing classrooms for instruction in reading. Other conclusions drawn from this questionnaire are discussed and specific recommendations are made. (TS)

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AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHER OPINION REGARDING STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND TEACHER ABILITY TO COPE WITH UNDERACHIEVEMENT

Introduction

Educational writers continue to project concern for the quality of instruction teachers are providing students in the classroom. Additionally, researchers are exploring the effectiveness of teacher education programs, the attitudes and skills of teachers, and the relationship of these variables to the performance of students. Still, when research studies were reviewed, little was found which reported teachers' opinions of: (1) their weaknesses in the art and science of teaching, (2) the major educational needs of students in the classroom, or (3) the relationships which existed between the attitudes of specific groups of teachers toward their teacher education programs. Research was also scanty in the views teachers held toward the reasons for student debilities in specific academic areas.

It has been said that: (1) if the characteristics of a good teacher were identified, then teacher education institutions could produce that kind of teacher; and (2) if the characteristics of a good student were identified, teachers could be taught to provide learning situations to produce that type of student. Although the statements are somewhat utopian: (1) can the establishment of appropriate educational procedures and programs begin elsewhere and (2) should not educational research be the vehicle to provide answers to the questions?

Related Literature

Research in teacher education has grown since the middle 1960's. Peck and Tucker (1973) reported several "themes" which emerged from the growing body of research. Three of these were: (1) the absence of any empirical research whatsoever in the area of training teachers of teachers, (2) findings that traditional ways of educating teachers revealed some undesired effects, and (3) a movement toward using pupil gain measures as the ultimate criteria for the effectiveness of any given teaching process.

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Gall, Borg, Kelley, and Langer (1969) studied certain personality variables of experienced teachers and their relationship to six kinds of teaching behaviors. Pre- and post- measures were taken of male and female teachers in an inservice minicourse in microteaching. Results showed that the influence of personality on teaching behavior almost disappeared for the males at the end of the in-service session. Conclusions were that through appropriate teaching techniques, instructional skills could be taught. Johnson (1969) reported that student teachers tended to change attitudes in the direction of their supervising teachers. Each supervisor and student teacher was measured on his degree of dogmatism according to Rokeach's Scale. A significant change in student behaviors was reported. Results indicated that behaviors learned in one area of teacher education may be altered by experiences in another. Microteaching (Cooper and Stroud, 1969) and mini-courses (Borg, Kelley, Langer, and Gall, 1970) were found to be especially effective in improving teaching competences in language skills, effective questioning techniques, and in meeting individual needs. Apparently, teacher education departments may devise programs that can affect change in behavior if specific steps are taken. Nevertheless, decisions need to be made as to which behaviors teacher education institutions should begin modifying, then procedures need to be developed to implement these decisions.

Assumptions

The study was conducted with the assumptions that classroom teachers, administrators, and special certificated teachers could:

1. Enlighten college teachers as to the major learning problems in academic areas being experienced by their students.
2. Indicate the causes for the major learning problems in academic areas of students under their direction.
3. Indicate the major areas of weaknesses in their college training attributable to their inability to deal effectively with the major learning problems of their students and at the same time, indicate their own educational

needs in helping students overcome these learning problems.

Questions Posited

An instrument was designed to allow the respondents to freely express their opinions concerning the major learning problems of students in the public schools, the quality and nature of their teacher education programs, and their retrospective views of courses which would have met their needs better than the ones which were taken. Statistical manipulation of the data enabled conclusions to be drawn which answered the following questions:

1. What major learning problems are students having in the public schools, and is there a relationship between the opinions of elementary school personnel and that of administrators, secondary teachers, and special teachers as a composite group?
2. Is there independence between the variables indicated as the major learning problems of the students and the ability of school personnel to provide an adequate program for them; also, is there independence between the variables indicated as the major learning problems of the students and the ability of school personnel to provide an adequate program for them; also, is there independence between the opinions of elementary school personnel on this question and that of administrators, secondary teachers, and special teachers as a composite group?
3. Is there concensus among the respondents as to the value of their undergraduate, graduate, or special certificate teacher education programs to provide adequate skills in coping with the major learning problems identified and does independence exist between the opinions of respondents holding undergraduate degrees and those who have advanced certificates or degrees?
4. For the students' major learning problems identified, what specific teacher training program activities were provided to teach the respondents to teach the subservient, underlying skills and related procedures inherent in the problem area and is there a relationship between the training received by

elementary school personnel and that of administrators, secondary teachers, and special teachers as a composite group?

5. Should all classroom teachers be required to take courses in the teaching of reading and if so, how many?
6. Should all classroom teachers be required to take at least one composite course in the techniques of teaching language arts which would emphasize reading, speaking, composition, handwriting, spelling, and listening skills?

The Instrument

The instrument used to collect the data was an open-ended opinionnaire. Part One dealt with information which described the respondents. Part Two posited the following:

> Write the three major causes of children being unable to perform well academically in the classes you teach. Scale: (a) Major weakness, (b) Secondary weakness, (b) Minor weakness.

Part Three of the instrument was developed to allow respondents to comment openly about the courses taken and specific skills developed in their college or university work at both undergraduate and graduate and/or specialized areas of education. The directives and questions were:

1. Write the three professional education courses (by title) which did not add to your ability to teach. Scale: (a) Major weakness, (b) Secondary weakness, (c) Minor weakness.
2. Write the specific courses (devise new ones if you desire) which would have prepared you better to teach children: (a) Major weakness, (b) Secondary weakness, (c) Minor weakness.
3. Did your undergraduate professional degree program prepare you to cope with the major learning problems children exhibit in the classroom? (Respond: Yes or No; Comments).

4. Did your advanced degree or special certification program prepare you to cope with the major learning problems students exhibit in the classroom? (Respond: Yes or No; Comments).
5. Did your degree program (at any level) teach you to perform the following: (Respond: Yes or No; Comments).
   a. Match materials to a student's reading level.
   b. Teach handwriting.
   c. Teach composition.
   d. Teach speaking skills.
   e. Teach listening skills.
   f. Organize a class for reading instruction.
   g. Ask higher order comprehension/thinking questions.
   h. Develop student's abilities to question.
6. Do you think undergraduate elementary and secondary majors should have a course in teaching reading and if so, how many?
7. Do you think undergraduate elementary and secondary majors should have a course in language arts which would emphasize techniques of teaching: speech, composition, listening, spelling, and reading? (Respond: Yes or No; Comments). (NOTE: This question allowed for responses for elementary and secondary separately).

Procedures Used And Descriptions of Respondents

The opiniomnaire was distributed to all public school administrative units within a twenty-four county area of southwest Missouri. Administrators were requested to distribute the instrument to faculty members. The opinionnaire was also distributed to students attending evening graduate classes at Southwest Missouri State University. (Controls prohibited any person from responding twice.) Returned opinionnaires totaled 158, with only four of the respondents not presently employed in education. The number was judged sufficiently large to subject the responses to analysis and statistical manipulation to answer the questions posited. The

responses were tabulated and tested by chi square for independence where applicable. Almost all catagorical data were subjected to chi square analysis between elementary school personnel and the remaining composite group of educators.

Characteristics of the Respondents

Categorization of the respondents yielded the characteristics in Table 1.

Insert Table 1

Presentation and Analysis of Data

In response to Question 1, "Write the three major causes of children's being unable to perform well in the classes you teach. Scale (1) Major weakness, (2) second weakness, (3) third weakness.

Table 2

RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS CONCERNING CAUSES OF CHILDREN BEING UNABLE TO PERFORM WELL IN THEIR CLASSES

LEARNING PROBLEM*	MAJOR (f)	SECONDARY (f)	MINOR (f)
Reading	76	19	25
Language arts	9	2	23
General language development	8	28	31
Math, Science, Social Studies (combined)	1	5	14
Student behavior (attitude, interest, self concept)	21	18	29
School, Community, Home (combined)	25	26	13
Teachers' Performance (individualizing, class control, poor teaching, lack of knowledge)	18	60	25

*It was impossible to list all problems; only those most frequently mentioned appear here.

Reading ability and related language abilities were the most frequently cited problem areas. Subsequently to determine if independence existed between elementary

Table 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

YEARS IN EDUCATION

Range: 1-38 (38) years
Mean: 7.8 years
Number: 158

60% (95/158) fell between 1-7 years.

LEVEL OF DEGREES

Undergraduate Degrees Only	84
*Advanced Degrees or Special Certification	74
TOTAL	158

*TYPES OF DEGREES

B. S. in Education	93
B.A. in Education	16
A.B. in Education	6
M.A. in Education	7
M.S. in Education	7
Specialist	7
Ed.D. in Education	5
TOTAL	158

*SPECIFIC POSITIONS

Administrators	29
Special Area Teachers	34
Learning disabilities	5
Art	2
Speech	3
Reading	8
Counselors	3
Librarians	5
Music	2
Educable Mental Retarded	6
Secondary Degrees	41
Elementary Degrees	50
Degree Holding (non-teachers)	4
TOTAL	158

SPECIAL CERTIFICATES

Reading	12
Psychological examiner	2
Speech pathology	1
Library science	2
TOTAL	17

*A discrepancy may appear to exist between positions held, advanced degrees, and types of degrees, however, Missouri certification policies would allow for this.

personnel and the composite group of other educators on this question, a chi square test was performed. Table 3 presents the data. There was no significant

Table 3

x^2 TEST OF INDEPENDENCE BETWEEN READING AND RELATED LANGUAGE AREAS AND OTHER PROBLEMS WHICH PREVENT CHILDREN FROM LEARNING AS VIEWED BY ELEMENTARY PERSONNEL AND A COMPOSITE GROUP OF OTHER EDUCATORS

	MAJOR		SECONDARY		MINOR	
	Elem.	Comp.	Elem.	Comp.	Elem.	Comp.
Reading/Language	35	57	21	28	22	57
Other	25	41	39	70	38	41
	x^2	=.0004	x^2	= .7188	x^2	6.878

(p .01 = 6.635)

independence at the .01 level of significance between the opinions of elementary personnel and the composite group as to the major cause for children's being able to perform well in the classroom. Significance was established at the .01 level of probability when the opinions concerning the minor problem areas were tested.

Neither the performance of the teacher nor the community, school, and home situation, as major causes of student inability received much attention; however, teachers' performance did appear frequently as a secondary cause. When school, community, and home were combined under the major cause classification and tested for independence against reading and language, it was found that extreme independence (x^2 = 31.668 p.01 = 6.635) existed. The combined variables of reading and language appeared 62 percent of the time while teachers' performance and the variables of school, and community appeared only 42 percent of the time. The teachers in this study identified reading and language difficulties as the major causes of poor student performance in the classroom. However, they did not identify their lack of teacher performance i.e., individualizing the classroom, controlling students, poor

teaching, or lack of knowledge about teaching reading and language arts, as a major variable being related to poor student performance. Neither did they view the environmental conditions in the school, community or home, as a major variable affecting student performance. Chi square analysis indicated independence between these combined variables. Student behavior did not appear to be a significant variable.

The educators' opinions were that the major cause of students' being unable to perform well in the classroom was the inability to read. There was strong dependence between the responses of elementary personnel and the composite group on this question; however, both groups indicated that teachers' ineffectiveness was a secondary cause of poor academic performance.

Analysis of the responses to the question, "Write the three professional education courses (by title) which did not add to your ability to teach," was somewhat difficult to analyze. Among the 158 respondents, there appeared to be no consensus as to any one course which did not add to their ability to teach. Thirty courses or types of courses were listed. Those courses receiving the most frequent mention are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS TOWARD COURSES WHICH DID NOT AID THEIR TEACHING SKILLS

COURSE	FREQUENCIES	MAJOR	SECONDARY	MINOR
1. Foundations in Education		52	18	12
2. Secondary Methods		35	10	2
3. Educational Psychology		16	16	6
4. Tests and Measurements, Statistics; Research		11	14	5
5. Elementary Methods		7	5	10
6. Audiovisual Education		5	3	7
7. Music Methods		4	7	0
	Totals	130	73	42

The remaining twenty-three courses listed were mentioned fewer than five times for either major, secondary, or minor designations. Respondents indicated that courses in foundations of education, secondary methods, education and psychology, tests and

them overcome the problems of children in the classroom. Seventy-two percent of the educators found these to be the major group of courses which were not helpful; yet, as individual entries, the courses did not amass high frequencies. No attempt was made to analyze this data statistically due to its uncontrollability.

This study attempted to solicit information from educators to aid the University in redesigning more relevant courses. The next directive was, "Write the specific courses (devise new ones if you desire) which would have prepared you better to teach children." Again, difficulty arose in analyzing the data. There was not one course or suggestion that had any consensus when the responses were tabulated. The courses listed with the highest frequencies appear in Table 5. Only twenty-two

Table 5

RESPONDENTS' SUGGESTIONS FOR COURSES WHICH WOULD AID THEIR TEACHING SKILLS

	COURSES SUGGESTED	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES
1.	Reading	30
2.	Student Teaching	18
3.	Language Arts	9
4.	Relevant Method Courses	7
5.	Learning Problems	5
6.	Psychology	5
	Total	74

courses were recommended. Twelve remaining courses were not listed in Table 5. Each had fewer than four frequencies. Suggestions for courses in parent counseling, classroom control, discipline, community relations, human relations, and social psychology appeared infrequently. Earlier, the lack of reading and language skills was reported as the major cause of student inability to perform well in the classroom; yet, when asked to list courses to aid them to cope better with these problems, only thirty-nine (24%) of the respondents indicated a need for reading or language arts courses.

The answer to question three, "Did your undergraduate professional degree program prepare you to cope with the major learning problems children exhibit in the classroom?," was an emphatic, "No." The respondents (147/158, 92%) indicated their undergraduate education did not prepare them to help their students overcome major learning problems. No significant independence existed between the opinions of the elementary personnel and the composite group when the data were subjected to chi square analysis. A x^2 of 1.042 was obtained. The elementary teachers (11%) indicated appropriate training and an even smaller percentage (5.5) of the composite group did so. No attempt was made to analyze within the composite group. It is clear that combined or separated, the teachers believed this facet of their undergraduate training was lacking.

The next query concerned the effectiveness of the respondents' advanced training. "Did your advanced degree or special certification program prepare you to cope with the major learning problems students exhibit in the classroom?" The respondents with advanced or special training reported more favorably. Of the seventy-four advanced or additional special certificated respondents, twenty-four (32%) reported their training prepared them to cope with these problems. The undergraduate and advanced groups were then separated. Testing the opinions of the undergraduate respondents against those having advanced or special certification yielded significant independence at the .01 level ($x^2 = 8.53$). Only thirteen percent of those with only undergraduate degrees (11/84) indicated they had training sufficient to cope with the learning problems of their students. Although significance existed between the two groups, it appears that based on percentages, neither group thought their training to be worthwhile.

It was anticipated that skills in language areas would be listed by the respondents as the major weaknesses of students. Therefore, the opinionnaire was written to allow teachers to indicate the emphasis given to specific teaching techniques in language skills during their professional education. The question

was asked, "Did your degree program (at any level) teach you to perform the following: (a) match materials to a child's reading level, (b) teach handwriting, (c) teach composition, (d) teach speaking skills, (e) teach listening skills, (f) organize a class for reading instruction, (g) ask higher order comprehension/thinking questions, and (h) develop children's abilities to question?"

The frequencies for these eight basic teaching competencies appear in Table 6.

Table 6

RESPONDENTS' REPORTS ON EMPHASIS GIVEN IN THEIR TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM TO EIGHT LANGUAGE ARTS AREAS

	COMPETENCY	Learned in Professional Educational Courses		
		YES (f)	NO (+)	% NO
1.	Matching materials to children's reading levels	60	98	62%
2.	Teach handwriting	30	128	81%
3.	Teach composition	40	118	74%
4.	Teach speaking skills	57	101	63%
5.	Teach listening skills	56	102	64%
6.	Organize a class for reading instruction	46	112	70%
7.	Ask higher level, cognition questions	66	92	58%
8.	Develop children's abilities to question	55	103	65%

Over one-half of the respondents had no training in teaching some or all of the basic communications skills required of students at some level between kindergarten and grade twelve. Seemingly, chi square testing should have yielded significant independence between the elementary personnel, who normally should be schooled in these areas, and the composite group. Table 7 indicates there is little to support this expectation.

Insert Table 7

A high percentage of secondary teachers within the composite group indicated they were not taught to match reading materials to children's reading levels or teach handwriting. It is understandable that secondary teachers did not receive instruction in handwriting but it does seem reasonable that they should have studied the relationship between reading achievement levels of children and readability levels of books. There was also a wide discrepancy between the percentages of elementary

Table 7

CHI SQUARE TEST FOR INDEPENDENCE AND
PERCENTAGE "NO TRAINING" BETWEEN
ELEMENTARY TEACHERS AND THE COMPOSITE GROUP

Technique	Match Materials		Teach Handwriting		Teach Composition		Teach Speaking		Teach Listening		Organize Class		Teachers Questions		Childrens Questions	
	EL	COMP	EL	COMP	EL	COMP	EL	COMP	EL	COMP	EL	COMP	EL	COMP	EL	COMP
YES (F)	28	32	20	10	13	27	22	35	19	37	24	22	23	43	18	37
NO (F)	32	66	40	88	47	71	38	63	41	61	36	76	37	55	42	61
% of NO	53	67	66	89	78	72	63	64	68	62	60	77	61	56	70	62
x^2	2.424		12.94		.685		.001		.6C2		5.55		.470		.986	
Sig.	p.01=6.635															

and the composite group regarding the organization of a classroom for reading instruction. The elementary teachers reported receiving more training which was probably due to the diverse nature of elementary school classrooms as compared to the traditional high school organization. There is some spread in the percentages of the two groups on the variables of organizing the classroom for teaching reading and matching materials to student abilities, but chi square testing indicated no significant independence (at the .01 level of probability) between the opinions of the two groups on any of seven variables. Only opinions toward teaching handwriting (x^2 12.942>p.01, 6.635) showed significant independence.

The 158 respondents indicated a void existed in their preparation for teaching the expressive and receptive communications skills, teaching children appropriate questioning skills, matching materials with children's reading levels, and organizing classrooms for instruction in reading. Not only is there consensus from the total group, but extremely strong dependence between the opinions of the elementary and composite group. Between 53 percent and 78 percent ($\bar{x}$ = 66.75%) of the 158 respondents left their respective colleges or universities without the necessary tools to teach the very skills they indicated were causing academic problems among their students. After teaching experience, inservice training, advanced work, and special certificate work, many still do not have the skills. Strangely enough, the teachers offered no significant number of suggested courses to aid them in overcoming these problems (Table 4). The reader is asked to draw his own conclusions.

The majority of the respondents were working within their area of certification. Only 15 percent (9/60) of the elementary teachers and 15 percent (15/98) of the composite group were working out of their fields. The number was not significantly large enough to indicate that misplacement was a cause for the teachers' inabilities to cope with the problems indicated.

The next question was, "Do you think undergraduate elementary and secondary majors should have a course in teaching reading, and if so, how many?" The

respondents indicated that elementary teachers should be required between at least one and five reading methods courses. One-hundred nineteen of the respondents recommended between two and four courses. The mean for all respondents was three required courses. The range of the recommended number of reading courses for secondary teachers was between zero and six while 124 of the respondents recommended between two and three reading courses. The mean was 1.87 courses. When queried directly, a very high percentage of the respondents indicated that all teachers needed to have courses in the teaching of reading; yet only thirty initiated such a recommendation on their own (Table 5).

The respondents were asked, "Do you think undergraduate elementary and secondary majors should have a course in language arts which would emphasize techniques of teaching: speech, composition, listening, spelling, and reading?" Sixty percent indicated a need for both elementary and secondary majors to be required that type of course; 33 percent indicated that only secondary teachers needed a language arts course and 7 percent believed that only elementary teachers should be required such a course. No further interpretation of this data was made. Table 5 contains data showing only nine respondents freely recommended a language arts course when given an opportunity to do so.

Conclusions

The data presented appears to support these answers to the original questions:

1. There was strong dependence between elementary teachers and a composite group of other educators that the major problems of student underachievement in academic areas was caused by weaknesses in reading and related language skills.
2. There was not statistical dependence between the reading/language arts weaknesses of students and the ability of the respondents to provide appropriate learning programs for them. Although the respondents reported that their training did not provide programs in the various expressive and receptive communications skills (the same as those identified as weaknesses among children), their responses did not indicate they viewed this as a major problem. They did,

however, note this personal void as a secondary problem.

When given the opportunity to recommend new or different courses which would have enabled them to aid children with the identified weaknesses, the respondents were very uncreative and unproductive. Yet, when asked directly, a significant number agreed that all teachers should be trained in the teaching of language arts and reading. Earlier assumptions by the writers that the biased nature of the instrument would direct respondents to answer in certain ways were dismissed.

3. There was significant independence between the opinions of advanced degree or special certificate holders and that of only undergraduate degree holders (x^2 = 8.53, sig. .01). The advanced training group reported that they were better able to cope with the identified learning problems. Apparently, teachers working beyond the undergraduate level acquire specific skills not found in undergraduate school. Even so, the percentage was not great enough to indicate that a large number of advanced certificate holders had the skills listed. Elementary teachers also reported better training in teaching specific language areas than the composite group, but significant independence was not found.
4. The data indicated there were few specific learning situations in their teacher education programs that dealt with the eight areas of teaching skills in language arts, reading, or classroom organization for reading. Significant dependence between the two groups was found and indicated that these skills were not included in the programs of elementary personnel or the composite group at either academic level.
5. With very few exceptions there was concensus that all teacher education curricula should contain at least three courses in the teaching of reading for elementary persons and two courses for secondary persons. Respondents favored the inclusion of reading courses, yet in free response, the teachers appeared to be unaware that the inclusion of reading courses may be one way to help solve the

children's problems. The authors question the amount of thought the teachers gave to that portion of the opinionnaire since it required more than just yes or no responses or a simple answer.

6. There was not strong consensus concerning the requirement of a language arts course for all teachers. Inferring beyond the data presented, however, the authors believe the respondents were in favor of such a course. Again, when open responses for suggestions were allowed, few teachers suggested it.

Recommendations and Summary

Based on the data collected and subsequent analysis, the following recommendations are made:

1. That teacher preparation institutions design instruments which will allow for measurement of the specific weaknesses children are displaying in the public schools and design programs (with appropriate short and long-range evaluations) to determine if student's needs are being met by teachers who have completed their training at that institution.
2. That programs be established at undergraduate and graduate levels to teach all teachers the necessary skills in communication required of students in the academic areas. Furthermore, teachers should be taught to teach the skills which are unique to their specialized area; consideration should also be given to techniques for student placement in appropriate materials and sound procedures for classroom management.
3. That specific studies be made of teacher education programs to determine their effectiveness in influencing or modifying the immediate and delayed behavior of prospective teachers.
4. That input from higher education students and practicing teachers be used to revise teacher education programs. In the final analysis, however, the university professors must assume responsibility for program modification that will meet the needs of prospective teachers and result in better practices in the classroom.
5. That provisions be made to enlighten public school districts of the expertise

they should expect from new teachers and consequently, what curriculum design should be instituted in their schools.

Finally, the authors think this study was limited by the weaknesses inherent in the opinionnaire and the lack of diversity in the comparisons and relationships conducted. Yet, the study does reveal very significant areas of concern about students in the classroom and offers some alternatives for modifying teacher education programs and subsequently, aiding teachers in eliminating some of these concerns.

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